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[Insert Trendy Title Here]:

A Study of Individuality and Identity Crisis in the *Child’s Play* films

Many of us can appreciate how hard it is to find the right movie to watch when you’re drunk. I’ve encountered this particular problem many times in my pseudo-adult life. Since reaching age twenty-one, I have spent roughly forty percent of my weekends in the home of my divorced father, slumped over in a tan leather rocking chair in front of his flat screen television, an empty bottle of Smirnoff to my left, a shot glass full of whiskey in my hand and several empty bottles in trash can, as I stare blankly at the screen. Although the Technicolor images and surround sound barely breakthrough my semi-conscious stupor, movies are important mood setters in situations like this, and a few weeks ago—after four beers and the always essential whiskey shot—I was again looking for some theatrical companionship.

The demon drink, which is becoming a regular character in my work, sent me stumbling over to my DVD rack, fumbling through every copy of every movie I own, unable to find one to satisfy whatever strange urges I was feeling at the time. When I was about to give up and go grab another Ziegenbock to drink away my frustration, a flash of black and red caught my eye. I pulled out the DVD and saw what looked like a demented Cabbage Patch doll on the cover, about to lop the head off of a terrified Jack-in-the-box. The hideous creature scowled over a tagline that read: *‘Sorry Jack…Chucky’s back!’* Somehow, this was just what I had been looking for.

The film revolved around a little boy in foster care being stalked by a killer doll. He tried to tell his foster mother and father, but they scorned him as a budding young lunatic and left him at the mercy of the murderous plaything, who eventually tied him to a bed with jump ropes and straddled him, reciting a voodoo incantation while the wide-eyed boy’s shrieks of terror were muffled by a gym sock gag. During the thirty or so minutes I managed to sit through before passing out, all I could think was, “Whoa! This is *fucked!* ***up****!*”

The next morning, passing through the living room on my way to get some aspirin, I noticed the *Child’s Play 2* DVD case still open in front of the TV, and I couldn’t help but smile. *Child’s Play 2* is the second film in a series I was near-pathologically obsessed with during my early-to-middle teen years. In the tenth grade, I even took recordings of lines from *Bride of Chucky*—the series’ fourth installment—and saved them to my phone solely to torture my decidedly less amused teachers and classmates, and to listen to them myself whenever I got bored with my after school Geometry lessons. Such fond remembrances would have escaped me the previous the evening, but my sober mind soon recognized that perhaps the underlying reason I’d selected *Child Play 2* out of all the other movies I own was because the *Child’s Play* series and Chucky, its beloved protagonist, were an integral part of my childhood.

For those of you who had normal childhoods, *Child’s Play* is a horror film released in 1988, near the end of the decade many consider to be the golden age of the slasher genre. The plot revolves around the madcap murderous hi-jinks of Chucky the Killer Doll. Chucky was originally a serial killer named Charles Lee Ray (which is a combination of notorious real-life serial killers Charles Manson, Lee Harvey Oswald, and James Earl Ray) who terrorized Chicago, Illinois under the moniker of ‘The Lakeshore Strangler’ before being fatally shot to death in a toy store and transferring his soul into a plastic Good Guy doll. Chucky has frizzy red hair and freckles that make one wonder if the Chucky character from the animated children’s television show *Rugrats* could have been based off of him (he wasn’t; I checked). He wears tattered blue overalls, a rainbow shirt and little red shoes. After *Bride of Chucky*, he came to be known for the array of ugly Frankenstein-esque stitches he accumulated during the film’s opening sequence. He stands at just over two-feet-tall, weighs somewhere around five pounds[[1]](#footnote-2) (not including the wires and special effects mumbo-jumbo required to make him move) and is regarded by his *Bride* and *Seed of Chucky* co-star Jennifer Tilly as a “horrifying little gremlin”[[2]](#footnote-3). Among horror greats like Jason Voorhees, Freddy Krueger, and Michael Myers, Chucky is regarded as somewhat of a joke.

However, despite receiving ‘No respect; No respect at all’ from many horror fans and even from the genre itself, Chucky and the *Child’s Play* franchise have spawned four sequels, two short-lived comic book series, thousands of look-alike dolls and a video game. The franchise has also grossed over $126,000,000 in the United States and $176,000,000 worldwide[[3]](#footnote-4). Tilly has stated that part of the reason Chucky appeals to people is because they can get their aggression out through him[[4]](#footnote-5). Likewise, producer David Kirschner believes “There is a little Chucky in all of us.” [[5]](#footnote-6) Whatever you may think of him, Chucky is an utterly merciless killer with numerous victims. Though he many not have achieved the same level of notoriety as his horror villain contemporaries, he is certainly among them and has definitely achieved cult—as well as, some would argue, celebrity—status, which is quite an accomplishment for someone of such miniature stature.

Although I had watched the second movie (and all the others in the *Child’s Play* series) many, many times, watching while intoxicated led me to see the films with newer, drunker eyes. So after re-discovering Chucky and *Child’s Play*, I sat down and watched the entire series. The franchise includes five films: *Child’s Play, Child’s Play 2, Child’s Play 3, Bride of Chucky,* and *Seed of Chucky.* What is noticeable just by looking at the titles is an apparent break between the first three films and the last two films. My re-viewing of the series reinforced that perception: the first three films are standard-fare horror, *Bride* shifts to a more self-referential style, and *Seed* degenerates into downright mockery. Arguably, the franchise’s single most striking detail is the total 180 degree disparity between where the series started and where it ended up.

If mainstream horror were a restaurant, watching a marathon of the Chucky films would be the equivalent of opting for the drive-thru. To view the series is to get a brief rundown in the last twenty years of the American horror genre—a ‘just add water’ movie history lesson. Naturally, since they are theoretically part of the same series, there are certain characteristics that are shared by all five films: they all run about ninety minutes, they were all written by Don Mancini and produced by David Kirschner, and of course, they all document the antics of Chucky the killer doll, who is always voiced by Oscar nominee Brad Dourif. But despite those acknowledged similarities, each of the *Child’s Play* films is reflective of the particular era in which they were produced. Because there is a sixteen year age difference between the first film (released in 1988) and the most recent film (released in 2004), the horror ideologies embraced by the five separate films are actually quite different. Therefore, it makes since to discuss the first three films as one unit before moving on to an analysis of their *Bride* and *Seed* predecessors.

***Child’s Play 1, 2 and 3***

The first three movies were made from 1988 to 1991. During this four year period, the slasher subgenre, although it was steadily losing popularity, was still the go-to for horror movie plotlines. *Child’s Play 1, 2 and 3* are fraternal triplets of each other, each more or less imitating the typical slasher style. All three revolve around the basic plot of Charles Lee Ray trying to free himself from the plastic Good Guy doll in which his soul has become imprisoned after being shot to death in a toy store. In the first three films, the only way for Chucky to escape his doll boy is to transfer his soul into the first person to whom he reveals his true identity. For whatever reason, he always seems to pick a small boy for this illustrious honor, and spends most of the movie’s length stalking his intended child victim in order to transfer his soul into his prepubescent body via this ritualistic voodoo chant: “Ade Due Dambala! Give me the power I beg of you!”

Aside from having the same plotline, CP1, 2 and 3 also have very similar underlying themes. They all seem to feature a child protagonist who lives his life in relative isolation, with few friends and an unreliable (at best) parental unit, as well as a very firm tradition of lead protagonist Andy Barclay not being able to catch a fucking break. Don Mancini scripted the original *Child’s Play* as a UCLA film student in response to the Cabbage Patch craze that was inciting parents everywhere to start brawls over dolls, and so the first three films also carry a strong undercurrent of criticism for advertising—children’s marketing in particular. Finally, the first three films also feature elaborate kill scenes and special effects that—twenty years later—still score pretty high on the impress-o-meter.

The films’ main protagonist is Andy Barclay, who is played by the doe-eyed and totally freakin’ precious Alex Vincent in the first two films and Justin Whalin in the third, for which the character was inexplicably aged to sixteen. Whalin, perhaps best known for playing Jimmy Olsen on *Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*, is by far the more experienced performer and in fact is still active in Hollywood today. It was Alex Vincent’s portrayal, however, which generated well-deserved critical acclaim, and it’s a shame that he never made another film after the second *Child’s Play*. He is now an engineer, and if the acting world doesn’t mourn his loss, it probably should.

In the original film, Little Andy, who has no father, is in such desperate need of a male role model that he has become obsessed with the “Good Guy” franchise to the point where he dresses up in Good Guy pajamas and eats Good Guy cereal every morning while watching the Good Guy cartoons. Of course, Play Pal—the same company that brought you all of this other crap—has created a doll, which the paternal-affection-starved Andy desperately wants for his birthday. But the hundred dollar price tag is a little more than his single working mother can afford, so she’s forced to buy one at a discount in a back alley from a toothless peddler (Here, you can clearly see the influence of the Cabbage Patch hype), not knowing that the doll is from the toy store where Charles Lee Ray was shot, or that Ray has managed to pass his soul into it.

The main reason Vincent is the better Andy is because he does such an admirable job of transforming Chucky’s favorite victim from a cherub-faced innocent to a battle scarred warrior suffering from killer-doll shellshock, while still bringing out the isolation and social ostracism themes which permeate the entire series. As the body count piles up and the six-year-old starts insisting his doll is alive, he is suspected of being the murderer and actually committed to a psychiatric facility! Fortunately, at the end of the first film, the police officers witness the doll’s murderous mayhem and Little Andy is exonerated, but if you’re thinking he’s off the hook, you’re wrong. Because at the beginning of *Child’s Play 2,* the dickhole police officers have denied everything like total scumbags so poor little Andy is in foster care while his mother rots in the psyche ward. Andy’s foster father, a crotchedy old bat who hates everything about everything, despises Andy and is constantly bitching at him for ‘making up stories’. The whole ‘outcast misunderstood by the world’ shtick also continues in the CP3, after Andy is sent to military school.

In both CP2 and CP3, Andy is pulverized by the outside world, which seems to regard as a freak for believing Chucky is alive. Denounced as a *“troublemaker”*, Andy is often singled out for special torture. He is picked on at both his elementary school and the military school and has very few friends. Whenever there’s a dead body, Andy is always somehow to blame for it, and his cries of *“Chucky did it!”* are always regarded as wide-eyed hysterics despite the fact that Andy gets more and more sedated with each kill until it’s clear he’s grown use to seeing death. At the beginning of CP1, Andy is giggly and precocious and by the time Justin Whalin takes over the role, you can just see the ‘Fuck my life’ in his eyes. It’s a shame that *Bride of Chucky* dropped Andy’s character, as the film would no doubt have followed his struggles as an alcoholic insurance salesman trying to deal with the aftermath of his layoff and recent divorce.

Like the original, the first two sequels focus heavily on commercialism, and both of the films portrayed the Play Pal corporate executives as amoral, avarice-soaked bastards who would probably cannibalize their own grandmother for a hundred dollar bill. The Play Pal guys are also incredibly stupid, since they’re usually the ones responsible for bringing Chucky back to life. They are always trying to make more money by resurrecting the Good Guy doll line and there’s always some dumbass corporate clown who thinks the way to do this is to rebuild the mutilated Chucky doll. It’s like they think: ‘No, we’re going to put him back together to show you that it’s okay.’ No, fuck you! It’s not okay! It’s not okay at all!

In case you don’t believe these Play Pal guys are assholes, here’s a word from their corporate kingpin: *“One of the hardest things about this business is that it is a business. It doesn’t matter what we’re selling—cars, nuclear weapons, or yes even toys. And what are children after all but little consumers.”* Thankfully, these jokers are always punished for their stupidity by being brutally murdered.

Isolation and commercialism aside, the most important thing you can get from the first three films is: doll or no fucking doll, Chucky is balls-to-the-wall badass. Sure, Chucky has some great one-liners *(“Nothing like a good strangulation to get the circulation goin’”,* after a kill and *“You g\*ddamn women drivers!”* to a girl who runs him over with a car) and there is no denying *Child’s Play*’s comedic aspects, but even when Chucky kills with laughs, he also kills with no remorse—and whether he’s killing them with a yo-yo or a knife, his shrieking victims are as dead as dead gets.

Chucky’s first kill is little Andy’s babysitter, Maggie. Maggie’s death differentiates the original *Child’s Play* from all of its predecessors by creating a very distinct element of mystery which is closer to other slasher movies of the era. The camera follows the doll’s movements in a manner similar to the opening sequence of the original *Halloween* in which the clown-mask-wearing Michael Myers murders his sister—it’s a kill in doll’s eye view. The audience even sees Andy’s toy hammer being picked up without ever showing the doll’s hand. This was done to create the suspicion that an unhinged Andy was the killer. While Maggie sits alone and unprotected in the kitchen, things start falling down and getting moved on their own as a frightened Maggie starts looking behind potted plants and brooms to find the culprit. It creates enough suspense that when the phone rings, it’s legitimately terrifying. But it’s only Karen and Maggie breathes a really short sigh of relief right before she gets hit with the tiny hammer and goes flying out the window.

I have no idea Maggie’s fall is not famous in the world of cinema because it’s pretty close to being the best thing ever. If you watch it in slow-mo (which I did. Three times.) you can see it like a beautiful dance in which Maggie is an ill-fated but lovely ballerina. After the blow with the hammer, it’s almost comical because she’s literally walking backwards and then turning around to hug the glass window, which shatters. The humor in this is completely mitigated by the absolute terror on Maggie’s face in the second before she hits.

She’s going to die. And she knows it.

Maggie falls—slowly if you’re watching it correctly—her limber legs kicking in the air like she’s walking, surrounded by shards of glass that flutter like snowflakes, until ultimately she crashes, hitting a car. The hatch flies up; the windows shatter and the glass makes another snowstorm. All the while, the white curtains from Karen’s apartment waves in the breeze like twin flags of surrender. Although the mystery of the killer’s identity distinguishes Maggie’s kill from the rest of the franchise, it established the fantastic cinematography for which the series would become known.

If there’s a point where the series begins to drift away from itself, it would have to be *Child’s Play 3*. The film departs from its own mythos in variety of ways. In the earlier films, a supernatural event or freak occurrence is always needed to bring him back, but in CP3 no real explanation is given. Also, a new life means the rules start over again, so Chucky reveals his secret to a new boy instead of to Andy and must steal his body instead. Critics viewed CP3 as darker and more violent than its predecessors and at one point, during the military camp’s annual war games, Chucky even fills several guns with live rounds and tricks the teams into firing on each other while he tosses hand grenades. Chucky was meaner and cruder than ever, and if it was an effort to make him scarier, the attempt backfired.

Throughout the third installment, Chucky hailed himself as *“new and improved”*, yet the filmmarked the beginning of a seven year hiatus due to an extremely low box office performance and a negative critical reception. Even the most sincere Chucky fans would regard the movie as rubbish, and today it’s the only CP film I don’t own. Gone were the lovely fluttering windows and exquisite snowstorms of broken glass: it was all guns, ammo and ‘fuck you, eat a grenade’. Chucky no longer had any style. He just seemed to be trying too hard.

***Bride of Chucky***

Not until 1998 was another *Child’s Play* film made. By then, traditional horror was out of vogue and a more self-aware ‘let’s all laugh at ourselves’ style was the dominant trend, having been pioneered by Wes Craven’s 1996 modern-day horror classic *Scream*. *Bride of Chucky* fully embraces this new attitude and takes the franchise in a lighthearted but surprisingly slick direction. While I’m admittedly biased towards horror movies that appear to wink at themselves, I personally believe this is the best *Child’s Play* film, and it was *Bride* that made me love Chucky.

There are notable differences between *Bride* and the rest of the franchise. In comparison to the previous installments, *Bride* features a bigger budget, a more attractive cast, and an unbelievably kickass soundtrack featuring artists like Judas Priest, Static X, and White Zombie. The film is also cool because it stars Oscar nominee Jennifer Tilly in a role she was born to play, Katherine Heigel in a role I’m sure she’d love to forget (which will be hard since I’m mailing her a copy of this essay once I’m done with it), and John Ritter as the disgruntled rent-a-cop uncle of Heigel’s character. The film looks different than the others (everything seems to be tinted some shade of blue) and Chucky gets a new look, adopting his signature face- full-o’-stitches after his bride-to-be Tiffany sews him back together. He’s kicked up notches unknown and ready to slash his way into the new millennium. But *Bride* also differs in much important ways.

First, *Bride* is actually a totally different genre than the three previous films. Rather than being a straightforward horror movie or even a wanna-be action flick complete with grenades, the fourth film is a romantic horror-comedy laced with black humor. The plot revolves around Chucky and Jennifer Tilly’s character, Tiffany, who just happens to be Chucky’s obsessed ex-girlfriend. According to Tiffany, she and Chucky used to bone back when he was Charles Lee Ray and he was dynamite in the sack and the best she ever had. (I’m not exaggerating; she says this about fifteen minutes in.) So then she sews up the doll and says the chant and Chucky comes back to life, but then the conflict starts. Turns out that despite her being a killer, Tiffany is surprisingly domestic and dreams of getting married and raising a family. Before he was killed, Tiffany thought Chucky was going to ask her to marry him, but when she brings it up he says, *“What are you fuckin’ nuts?”* and starts laughing. Hurt and rejected, Tiffany locks Chucky up in a wooden playpen (That’ll teach him to think he can get the milk for free!) but he uses a wedding ring to saw his way out, murders Tiffany and transfers her soul into a pretty bride doll so that she will understand how much being a doll sucks. They then embark on a road trip that is part domestic bliss part killing spree, until they get into a fight at the end and start taking jabs at each other’s bedroom performance, which enables their hapless human captives to get the upper hand. Chucky stabs Tiffany to death before being shot himself, but at the very end she springs back to life just long enough to give birth to a fanged, gruesome creature which slithers from her womb and lunges right at a nosy police officer’s face.

If this sounds ridiculous, it’s because it is and this time it’s supposed to be. Most of *Bride*’s humor is fiendishly clever. You can see the self-referential style right from the opening sequence, which features a police station’s evidence locker filled with little shot-outs to the greats. They have Jason’s hockey mask, Michael Myers’ Halloween mask, and Freddy Krueger’s glove. Later on in the film, when Chucky and his bride kill off John Ritter’s character, they do so by shooting his entire face full of nails—a reference to *Hellraiser*’s famous villain Pinhead. No direct mention is made of these famous movie; it’s just a brief nod to the visionaries who paved Chucky’s way. The film is also peppered with pop-culture references. When Tiffany declares that Martha Stewart is her idol, an unimpressed Chucky barks back, *“Who the FUCK is Martha Stewart?”* and during their climactic fight, Tiffany screams, *“Fuck Martha Stewart! Martha Stewart can kiss my shiny plastic butt!”* While CP3 went out of its way to make Chucky as humorless as possible, *Bride* openly courts laughter.

A second way in which *Bride* differs from the other CP films is that it shifts its focus from the human characters to the plastic ones. It was pretty much impossible not to feel something for Alex Vincent’s Andy. When that adorable little tot hunched in the corner of that old, crappy psychiatric ward with tears streaming down his face, begging and pleading to be let out because he knew Chucky was coming to kill him, it was almost devastating to watch. If you had anything resembling a heart, it went out to him. You were invested in Andy, so you rooted for him.

In *Bride*, Jesse and Jade—played by Nick Stabile and Katherine Heigel—are the film’s human protagonists. In that regard at least, *Bride* hasn’t strayed far from its roots because surprise, surprise: Jade’s an orphan! After her parents died, she was left with her controlling cop uncle and there’s an angst-ridden forbidden love subplot how her uncle won’t let her date Jesse because he lives in a trailer park so they run away to get married. It’s mildly compelling at best and there’s almost no character development with either Jesse or Jade and it doesn’t matter. The dolls are now the stars. You don’t root for Jesse and Jade; they’re losers. You root for Chucky. Chucky is cool.

Thirdly, the kills are arguably more inventive than ever. The style is back. From a technical standpoint, Chucky’s proposal to Tiffany is gorgeous. It comes after Tiffany throws a champagne bottle at the glass ceiling of a honeymoon, causing it to shatter into hundreds of falling knives, which skewer a newly married couple. The water bed the couple had been banging on top of explodes into a geyser of blood, water, and body parts. In ecstasy, Chucky immediately drops to one knee on a blood-soaked bearskin rug that used to be white and proposes to her with the ring from the severed finger of the newlywed they just killed.

Fourth, in contrast to the other films *Bride* alters its themes dramatically. The first three *Child’s Play* films seem to have dark underlying implications about childhood and consumerism. With the fourth installment, there are no children at all and Andy Barclay is never mentioned. The negative view of consumerism has been completely dropped and Chucky indulges in both rock music and drugs. Chucky also indulges in sex, but only after he is married. In the other three films, sex is barely mentioned, but *Bride* focuses on it heavily. In a very unusual twist on classic horror, all of the characters that have explicit sex in the movies are married and the movie seems to discourage sexual impropriety. Although a doll marriage may not be legal, Tiffany and Chucky only have sex after the ring is on her finger. (Yes! I’m not kidding! They get busy right there.) At the beginning of the film, Chucky also murders Tiffany’s pseudo-boyfriend who, despite her having repeatedly said no, was being a little pushy about them having sex. Chucky rips out the guy’s stupid lip-ring and suffocates him with a pillow. He then sits on top of the guy’s face while he smothers to death and starts shooting the shit with Tiffany in a sexually charged ridiculous moment. *“You know me,*” she says, looking away demurely. *“I’ll kill anybody, but I’ll only sleep with someone I love.”*

You’ve got to love horror movies with strong sexual morals. Besides, guys have to learn no means no.

Finally, *Bride* differs by taking the franchise even further away from its original mythos. To get out of the doll bodies, Chucky and his bride have to go dig up his corpse, which is buried in Hackensack, New Jersey, so that they can retrieve an amulet called the Heart of Dambala, which will allow them to make the switch. The amulet was never mentioned in any of the previous films, nor was he really wearing it when he died. Also, Ray’s body was buried in Hackensack when the original movie took place in Chicago, Illinois. The dolls are momentarily stumped on how to get to Hackensack, despite the fact that Chucky has successfully packaged and mailed himself in previous installments. Fortunately, he’s still badass. To convince everyone Chucky hasn’t lost his mojo, the film has him initiate a high-speed police chase during which he shoots the cops off the road, using Katherine Heigel as a shield. And before he dies, his last lines are: *“Go ahead and shoot! I’ll be back! I always come back!* ***\*heavy sigh as Heigel’s character cocks her gun\**** *But dying is such a bitch.”*

The film received mixed reviews, and was justly criticized for its pronounced difference from its three predecessors. Many felt betrayed by Chucky’s new attitude (I guess telling Martha Stewart she can kiss plastic ass is just too much awesome for some people) but Chucky’s image was simply taken into a new direction—one I thought made much more sense than the Rambo-knockoff he was in CP3. Under the late 90’s horror style, Chucky and company stopped taking themselves so seriously. They gave up on trying to make Chucky a horror giant. For obvious reasons, that wasn’t going to work. In *Bride*, the makers of *Child’s Play* finally seemed to say, ‘Hey! We’re a franchise about a killer doll! We may not be scary, but we’re pretty damn cool.’

***Seed of Chucky***

Columbine and September 11th added to an already growing concern that violence in TV and movies contributed to violence in children real life. Since it featured a child’s plaything as a killer, *Child’s Play* had always been particularly vulnerable to such criticism. The success of *Freddy vs. Jason—*a mash-up of the two horror greats—renewed interest in a sequel to *Bride*, but by this time trends had shifted again. *Scary Movie* and other forms of horror-parody, rather than horror-comedy, now influenced the film’s direction, much to the detriment of Chucky, his image, and the entire franchise.

In *Seed,* Glenn, the pathetic-looking, green-skinned creature the baby born in the cemetery at the end of *Bride* has grown into—flees a physically abusive who has locked him in a cage and forced him to star in a ventriloquist dummy act with a traveling circus, and escapes to Hollywood because Chucky and Tiffany’s bodies have been recreated for use in a new movie Glenn has seen them on TV and identified them by the ‘Made in Japan’ logo on their wrists. Unlike his parents, he’s a total pussy and can’t stand violence of any kind. Glenn makes it to Hollywood with that damn amulet from *Bride* and accidentally says the chant. Chucky and Tiffany come back to life, immediately kill a SFX technician and fall back in love, tonguing passionately through their bloodstained plastic faces as Glenn wets himself.

*Seed* takes *Bride’s* self-references to a ridiculous level, and features a confusing array of stars and SFX technicians playing themselves. Although she still voices Tiffany, Jennifer Tilly also plays ‘Jennifer Tilly’—a self-absorbed movie star who is unhappy about having to star in the new film *“Chucky Goes Psycho”* (*“I’m an Oscar nominee and now I’m fucking a puppet!”).* She is so unhappy that she decides to sleep with rapper Redman (who is playing himself) to land a part as the Virgin Mary in his new movie. Since Glenn is anatomically ambiguous, he’s gender-confused. Tiffany and Chucky can’t agree on whether they want him to be a boy or a girl, so they decide the only solution is to have Chucky masturbate to Fangoria magazines so they can artificially inseminate ‘Jennifer Tilly’ with his sperm—hence the movie’s tagline, ‘Get a load of Chucky’—so that they can pass Glenn’s soul into the baby and then pass their souls into Jennifer and her chauffeur. Meanwhile, since Glenn is still a pussy, he announces he doesn’t want to be a killer. Tiffany renounces killing for Glenn’s sake and convinces Chucky to do the same, but they both go back on their word and *“slip”* in front of Glenn, who, they both swear to secrecy. He quickly goes insane under the pressure and splits into two identities—the peace-loving Glenn and his murderous female counterpart Glenda.

Jennifer becomes pregnant with a rapidly growing fetus which reaches full term within a few days. Jennifer conveniently delivers twins, a boy and a girl, and they decide to cast part of Glenn’s soul into each of them. They tie Jennifer and her chauffeur to a bed and are about to perform the transfer when Chucky decides this is too fucking ridiculous and he doesn’t want to be human after all.

*“If this is what it takes to be human, I’ll take my chances as a supernaturally possessed doll! I’m one of the most notorious slashers in history! I’m Chucky! The killer doll! And I dig it!”*

*“But,”* Tiffany says in a small voice. *“I want to be Jennifer Tilly. I want to be a star!”*

Saying she doesn’t know who Chucky is anymore, she tells him she’s leaving and Glenn. Chucky becomes furious and tries to kill Tiffany, but the police show up and take Jennifer to the hospital. They take her babies and keep her under psychiatric supervision. (Sound familiar?) Tiffany breaks in and finishes the chant, but then Chucky kills her with an axe to the head. Enraged, Glenn chops off Chucky’s arms and legs with an axe, hysterically screaming, *“ARE YOU PROUD OF ME NOW, DADDY?”* In a flash forward the end of the film, it is Jennifer, who is living happily with her twins, murders her children’s nanny and her eyes glow green, revealing that the transfer was finally successful and she is actually Tiffany.

*Seed* takes *Bride’s* humorous horror and perverts it into something barely recognizable. Instead of black comedy, *Seed* is closer to slapstick and the result is 90 minutes of gross-out humor that is disturbing, not funny and downright offensive not only to fans but to anyone with a shred of decency. In addition to the Fangoria-inspired jerk-off, there was doll nudity (Tiffany flashes Chucky for masturbation motivation) and a scene in which Chucky touches ‘Jennifer’ while she is tied to the bed and fondles her breasts, only to exclaim “*She came on to me!”* when Tiffany catches him. Because nothing is as funny as rape…except the murder of Britney Spears. In a huge continuity error, Chucky and Glenn go joy-riding and run Spears off the road as Chucky cackles, *“Oops! I did it again!”*—even though Chucky stated in *Bride* that the dolls can’t drive. The *Seed* kills were neither beautifully shot nor terribly original, they were only disgusting, as when Tiffany castrates Redman at a kitchen table while Glenn twitched in the background.

Since *Seed*, Chucky is no longer cool and he is no longer badass. He’s more like that annoying uncle of yours that’s always telling the fart jokes at the family reunion and trying to use the ‘rad’ new slang. He’s a joke and a punch-line…but no one has the heart to tell him.

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Confused? I sure was. After watching the entire series, all I could think was that the whole thing made a lot more sense when I was drunk. After taking a long night drive to clear my head, blasting the still-amazing *Bride of Chucky* soundtrack through my speakers, I came home and cuddled up in my white and orange Chucky nightshirt, wanting only to pet my tiny brown Dachshund. When I tried, he growled the meanest little growl you’ve ever heard, sounding suspiciously like another distempered midget I know. With a sigh, I walked into the kitchen to snack on some Junior Mints. As soon as I had the Junior Mints in my hand, my dog was suddenly my best friend. Instead of biting me, he was now licking my face as if all he wanted in the world was my approval and devotion.

What does this have to do with anything? Simple. My dog is a cheap little slut who is perfectly comfortable trading his affection for chocolate coated mints. In the same token, the writers and producers of *Child’s Play* are apparently willing to change and modify their vision in accordance to whatever hip new trend is in style.

On first glance, *Seed of Chucky* appears to be so different from the other four films that it doesn’t seem to belong. When examined more closely, however, one should realize that the abomination is really a metaphor for how the entire series has self-destructed. The idea of buying and selling sex is present throughout the movie as is, ironically, the idea of identity. Sadly, in our culture, sex really does sell. Jennifer Tilly reiterates as much in the production notes of *Seed,* in which she remarks “I give the audience what they want” to explain why there isn’t a single shot where she’s not showing cleavage. “This is what sells in Hollywood”[[6]](#footnote-7). Tilly finds it more or less acceptable to display her body as a commodity to get work, just as her *Seed* alter-ego prostitutes herself to play the Virgin Mary. Like Chucky’s gender-confused offspring, *Child’s Play* no longer knows what it is, and none of the characters do either. Glenn doesn’t want to be a killer, but he becomes one anyway and murders Chucky. Chucky and Tiffany renounce killing because their son wants them to, even though that’s always been who they were. And everybody is playing themselves until you don’t even know whether they’re them or their character. Unconsciously, *Child’s Play* knows it’s a whore but can’t seem to stop opening its legs.

From the beginning, *Child’s Play* lacked vision. It began as a response to a craze and that is exactly what it still is today. It styled itself after other slasher movies of the same decade and didn’t deviate until *Bride*. The failure of *Child’s Play 3* made them realize their gimmick was campy, but in 1998 campy was good. Under this late ‘90’s style, the gimmick thrived but with each modification Chucky lost something. With each successive film, the series knew less about itself: it didn’t know whether he could drive; it didn’t know how he felt about pre-marital sex; by 1998, they didn’t even know which state Chucky was originally from. This is especially sad when one considers that all five movies were written by Don Mancini. He gave life to a character and then not only did he allow it to be perverted, he eagerly assisted in the destruction of his own plastic progeny. Why? Because the *Child’s Play* camp wants to make squillions of dollars and they don’t care how they do it. They are a bunch of unscrupulous whores just like my dog.

This idea of perpetual prostitution—of shifting the series’ colors to blend with everyone else—was especially hard to reconcile with the original themes of ostracism and being forced to fend for oneself. But after examining my notes from the films, it soon became clear that the Chucky’s targets were singled out *because* they were outcasts. *Because* they were alone and easy targets. When Mrs. Barclay refused to say what everyone wanted to hear, she was locked into a psychiatric ward. When Andy couldn’t be ‘normal’, he was rejected and bullied. Individuality is very much punished in *Child’s Play*, even among its protagonist. It is very telling that the entire series revolves around the idea of Chucky wanting to become another person. When Chucky was finally ready to accept himself, no one else around him was; and in the end, conformist Tiffany was rewarded by becoming Jennifer while individualist Chucky died a horrible painful death…again. Instead of saying, ‘*Be a killer doll if that is what you are.’*, the franchise’s hidden message is: *Assimilate! Conform! Be like everyone else!*

Mancini, Kirschner and the rest of Chucky’s camp don’t appear to be ashamed of embracing the blatant commercialism they created *Child’s Play* to fight. They don’t seem to see any problem with becoming just like the amoral Good Guy corporation that cared for nothing but profit or embracing the consumerism they wanted to fight. Certainly they’re not concerned with the plastic anti-hero who depends on them to create and maintain his image. When *Seed* was released, there was even talk of creating a sixth and seventh *Child’s Play* film, one of which would be a musical. Sometimes I wish Chucky were alive; he would never put up with this crap.

I suppose it’s easy to come down on something as blatantly promiscuous as *Child’s Play*, but there is certainly blame to go around. I’m sure we all remember a time when we had to have the newest Beanie Baby, Pokemon card or Gigapet because everyone else did. It didn’t matter whether you actually gave a shit about any of those things. If Monday rolled around and you couldn’t trade your friend Benny a Squirtle for a Charmander, your name was mud, and you could forget about anyone playing with you at recess. And this kind of peer pressure doesn’t go away when you get older. You need a Kindle. And a Smart-phone. And an iPod. Everyone else has one, and you can’t be behind. You can’t be *different.* Things like magazines, clothing lines and electronic gadgets do not merely sell products but the idea of belonging.

It’s not surprising that such conformity readily translates into media. If a novel about a teenage vampire makes money, soon everyone you know will be writing their teenage vampire love saga. If a television series based off of a best-selling book series garners success, soon everyone is trying their luck doing the same thing. In our current society, originality is an endangered species.

As much as I want to despise *Child’s Play*, I remain unable to do so completely. I have a love-hate relationship with the franchise. I hate what they have done to a character I grew up with, but malevolent little sellout though he is, Chucky was my childhood friend and it’s hard for me to abandon him. And if I ever do think about riding a moral high-horse, the animatronic Good Guy voice in my head just may remind me of how hard it is to make it as a writer and warn me of a day when I ***will*** have to compromise at least some of my vision to get published, to get publicity, or yes, just to make money. So I suppose Kirschner was right: There’s a little Chucky in all of us.

1. “Chucky from *Child’s Play* is Certainly Recognizable.” The Horror Czar, Don Sumner. 2006. Accessed 13 March 2012. <<http://www.best-horror-movies.com/childs-play.html>> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. “*Seed of Chucky:* Production notes.” International Publicity Contact: Dee Poku. 13 March 2012. <thecia.com.au/reviews/s/images/seed-of-chucky.rtf/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. “Child’s Play (Film Series).” Wikipedia. 14 March 2013. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child%27s_Play_(film_series)>> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. “*Seed of Chucky:* Production notes.” International Publicity Contact: Dee Poku. 13 March 2012. <thecia.com.au/reviews/s/images/seed-of-chucky.rtf/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. “*Seed of Chucky:* Production notes.” International Publicity Contact: Dee Poku. 13 March 2012. <thecia.com.au/reviews/s/images/seed-of-chucky.rtf/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. “*Seed of Chucky:* Production notes.” International Publicity Contact: Dee Poku. 13 March 2012. <thecia.com.au/reviews/s/images/seed-of-chucky.rtf/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)